

# module 1

## Grade 3

During workstations there were a variety of tasks students could choose to complete while at their station, and a task board which directed students to their next station. Although procedures for accessing these materials and expectations for behavior were reviewed frequently at the start of the workstation period, this group was not demonstrating the ability to follow those procedures. After a week of observations, I had recorded redirecting this group of students during each transition to a new workstation, as well as multiple times at each station for an average of 15 times in 45 minutes. It was clear that this would continue to affect the productivity of the students in the group and the rest of the class.

I observed several reasons for the interruptions. One reason was the students said they did not know what they should be working on. Although all the materials needed for the workstation were located at that workstation area this group would spend their time looking through materials and trying to decide which task to complete. Another reason for the interruptions was the students did not come to the workstation prepared with their literacy materials, pencils, and work folders. The students would leave their workstation to return to their desks to gather materials, often stopping to talk with other students. Related to this reason for being off task, students often misplaced materials in their desks and did not have the necessary materials to complete workstations. The last observed reason was the students did not use the task board to see where they should go next during the transitions between workstations. The students would wander to other stations, talking to the other students, and would need me to redirect them to the task board or to their station. The results of these interruptions were minimal time spent on task, as well as getting other students off task in the process, and not completing assignments.

Upon further reflection I realized that if I could get this group of students to be more organized during workstations, and to manage their transitions during workstations, they would spend more time on learning. More time spent on learning would result in fewer interruptions to the class and increased productivity within the group. Based on the CCT Performance profile, I decided to focus on indicator 5; *Maximizing the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions*. I fell in the second part of the continuum. Instructional arrangements are planned but some instructional time is lost because the teacher continually redirects students through transitions, and materials are available but there are no established procedures for their access or use. Through research, observations and discussions with colleagues, I was able to implement new strategies to effectively manage this group during workstations.

After reading the chapter *Making it Work: Organizing and Managing Time, Space and Resources* in Fountas and Pinnell's *Guiding Readers and Writers*, I learned the importance of not only having materials organized for the students, but how having them easily accessible to the students would also affect the management of my class. Students would save time gathering their materials, hold better value for their work and stay more organized overall. At first, I felt that I had made the materials easily accessible to the students because, each workstation in the classroom had a basket or binder filled with materials and tasks to complete and procedures for accessing these materials had been reviewed with the students. I realized the problem was with the materials the students needed to bring with them from their desks, such as their pencils, writing folders, guided reading books and work which needed to

be completed. Of the average 15 interruptions, at least 5 interruptions were because students had to go back to their desks to gather individual materials. Individual student materials needed to be more accessible to students in order to have the results of increased time on task and productivity.

Fountas and Pinnell suggested having individual work and storage space for literacy materials in order to make materials more accessible, to show value for student work and to allow me to easily examine student work. For this group of students I implemented the use of individual literacy binders. Each student was provided with a binder which was divided into the workstations which they might visit on a given day. Each section had the tasks to complete that had been found in the baskets or binders at the workstations. I put those materials in the binders in order to keep the students focused on their materials and not on searching for tasks to complete. I included a sturdy double-sided pocket labeled for completed work and unfinished work, as well as a place to keep students' guided reading books and reading response journals. I provided each student with pencils, sticky notes and bookmarks to keep in their binders to prevent the need to return to their desks. As a group, we decided to use the bookshelf as the central location to make the binders easily accessible to all students in the the group. This impacted how I prepared for workstations because I had to maintain the individual binders by keeping tasks and assignments up to date in the specific sections of the binders.

The students quickly adapted to using their literacy binders as a way to stay organized. Once the students began to use the binders I observed only one to three interruptions in a week due to missing materials. When the students needed to rotate through their workstations they gathered their materials neatly in their binders and moved to their next workstation knowing they had all the necessary materials for that station. The students no longer needed to search through the materials at the stations or risk not having what they needed when they reached a workstation. The students also demonstrated taking more pride in their work and materials. I noticed students taking care of their binders and leaving them neat and organized. Prior to having their own binders, these students would leave the workstations with materials out or would put them back in the wrong places. With this increased organization their work stayed neat and they felt better about presenting their work to me for review. Staying organized helped the students determine which assignments still needed to be completed or which needed to be moved to their finished folder.

Having an easily accessible location for the binders saved time at the start of each workstation period. The students were able to move right to the bookshelf and gather their binders and begin their workstations. I observed the other students in the classroom and it took three to five minutes for those students to gather their materials before beginning their workstations. During this time they carried on conversations with other students, forgot materials and neglected to check which station they were to visit first. The group with the binders took less than a minute to get their binders and begin. Their conversations were minimal and were related to the process of gathering their binders and stating which workstation they were heading to. This resulted in more time on task and prevented them from interrupting others. Having the assignments and tasks already in their binders allowed the students to sit down and begin working immediately upon reaching their workstation.

Fountas and Pinnell also suggested eliminating materials which are not essential as it will interfere with management. I had a variety of materials, assignments and tasks at each workstation for students to choose from at each visit. I felt this was necessary in order to differentiate my instruction for my students as well as to assess student learning based on different assessment tasks. I decided to use this strategy of eliminating materials within this group's individual binders as a way minimizing clutter and prevent overwhelming them with materials that are not appropriate for their academic levels.

This strategy impacted the way I was assessing my students and planning for their independent work because I needed to analyze data from previous assessments to determine which areas they needed more practice with and how to differentiate their binders. After deciding which skills needed practice in this group I was able to choose a few assignments and tasks to include in each section of the binder. This allowed me to monitor what activities the students were choosing on a regular basis.

I was able to observe a decrease in the amount of time it took these students to choose a task at each workstation. Each task was at their independent level which allowed the students to briefly look at the choices and select an assignment with the knowledge they were choosing something appropriate for their learning. Eliminating the extra assignments reduced their anxiety with the amount of choices and helped the students to pick a task within 1 minute of reaching their workstation. There were fewer materials which would have been distracting, which resulted in more time on task. The students were able to feel confident in their task choices because the tasks were differentiated for them and allowed them to successfully demonstrate their learning, which continued to increase their motivation and productivity.

Another resource I found helpful was *The Highly Engaged Classroom*, by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering. According to this text, having good pacing is necessary when transitioning from one activity to another. This is essential to avoid unnecessary interruptions that may affect student engagement. The workstation task board which I had in the classroom was intended to create good pacing by allowing students to see which workstation they should move to next from any point in the room without having to ask me, other students, or return to the task board. This was intended to prevent students from gathering in one location which would cause them to have conversations and become distracted. This group of students did not use the task board the way it was intended and continued to ask where they should go next, or spent too much time lingering at the task board talking with each other or their classmates.

After observing this behavior, I knew I needed to differentiate how these students would follow a routine. I provided each student in the group with a personal workstation schedule which they were able to put in the clear pocket at the front of their binder. I needed to make sure I had planned where the students would be going each day, and would modify their schedules based on how the previous day went. I would meet with the students prior to the start of the literacy block to share their schedules with them.

The students responded well to having their own schedule sheets. There were no longer any interruptions caused by students asking where they should go next, as well as no interruptions from students going to the task board and spending too much time there. There was less opportunity for movement around the room, which prevented the students from becoming sidetracked with other students or at other stations. I also noticed the students were able to take the time gained and use it to gather their materials in their binders and clean up their workstation. The students did not have to rush to find out where they needed to go and could focus on taking care of their work.

In *The Highly Engaged Classroom's* chapter on research and theory, Marzano and Pickering explain studies which show the affect *choice* has on students in the areas of intrinsic motivation, effort and task performance. Marzano and Pickering suggest that choice is way to make students feel the importance of classroom tasks and activities. In chapter four, the authors explained providing choice of task, choice of reporting format, choice of learning goals and choice of behaviors as the four ways of providing choice to students. I chose to focus on the choice of task. I wanted the students to have the opportunity to choose which tasks they wanted to complete to support their learning so they felt a connection to what they were learning, and to understand the role they had in their learning. I had opportunity for choice at the original workstations, but as I learned from Fountas and Pinnell, there were too many choices and unnecessary materials needed to be eliminated.

To support the idea of choice, I had to observed the types of tasks the students were choosing on a regular basis and decided which tasks were most meaningful for them, as well as which tasks I wanted them to choose in order to further their learning. My practice changed how I reviewed student work and progress. I had to make sure these students had to opportunity to choose tasks that would not only interest them based on their prior choices, but would also benefit their learning. I had to look at completed tasks to determine which skills needed reinforcement and decided on tasks which would reinforce these skills in a meaningful way. I noticed this group would choose the same task each time they went to a workstation which resulted in not practicing other skills they needed. I also noticed that not all the tasks that I had available to other students in the class were appropriate for this group. I would have to ensure students were completing tasks at their independent level. For example, this group of students would often choose to write vocabulary sentences at the vocabulary station but were not using the words correctly when completing other vocabulary tasks. It was clear to me that I needed to have this group work with the vocabulary words in task which required a greater understanding of the words but with the creative aspect of the sentence writing. I chose to include 2 different graphic organizers in the vocabulary section of the binders which the students used to write a sentence using the words after they identified synonyms, antonyms, word meaning and were able to illustrate the word. This gave the students choice of words to complete with the graphic organizer, the creative aspect they enjoyed, and it reinforced the skills they needed.

For each workstation section of the binder I included 3 or 4 task choices for the students. I explained the task so there was no confusion about the directions or learning goals. I also explained to the students that although they could choose which task they wanted to complete each day, they had to complete each task before I would add new tasks to their binders. This was helpful because the students could feel they had a role in their learning by choosing which tasks they wanted to complete

and when, but I could also ensure they were meeting their learning objectives and being exposed to a variety of skills. These materials were differentiated for this group which allowed the students to be successful in their learning which ultimately increased their motivation, resulting in increased productivity.

I wanted to get feedback from the students about how they felt these new routines were working. I discussed what I was hoping to accomplish with a colleague and she shared how she had a whole class discussion at the end of workstations to discuss how the class felt workstations went. I decided that I would implement a similar strategy with this group and meet at the end of each week to review and correct their work, discuss their overall behavior, highlight their strengths from the week and make a plan for the areas in need of improvement. We also discussed which skills or learning goals they would need to focus on for the next week. This feedback was important for the students as well as for me. It impacted how I planned activities for the students, and allowed me to monitor their progress. The students enjoyed this time because it provided clear feedback for their learning. I saw increased effort because they knew they would be held accountable for their work.

As I look back at the past few months, I can see how much growth my students have made in regards to maximizing their time spent on learning through transitions and routines (Indicator 5). I believe the success the students achieved, and the changes in my teaching, are a result of the combination of strategies I learned through research and practice. These students have decreased the amount of interruptions from an average of 15 in a 45 minute period, to 3 or less during a 45 minute period. The materials are organized and easily accessible for the students. The students have a clear, established routine which is allowing them to spend more time on task, and increase their productivity.

In addition to this group maximizing their time on task and increasing their productivity, I have seen a positive effect on the rest of the class. The class is interrupted less by this group, and this allows them to continue working and being productive. Although these strategies worked with a small group, I would like to implement these strategies with the remainder of my class. I feel all my students would benefit from having routines which are clearly established, and materials which are easily accessible. I would like to explore how these routines could be established during other learning blocks in the day to increase productivity and time on task. During this process, I have learned the value implementing new strategies and reflecting on past practices has towards my growth as an educator.